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“FROM TODAY TO THE REVOLUTION”

NONPOLITICS IRAN, REVOLUTION, RIOTS

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About 50 days have passed since the beginning of Iran's uprising, with many precious lives lost each day. Although a majority of people participate in mass movements, historically and in practice, an active minority have carried out the crucial task of organizing and leading the

movement. They are, unfortunately, the first to be targeted, arrested, and killed; this is no different today. Therefore, an irreparable blow has been done to the movement by the killing, abduction, or detention of these leaders from campuses, dorms, and workplaces. Tactical flexibility, changing political initiatives according to the severity of the repression, division of labor between semi-public and secret groups, and updating the protection methods can reduce the impact of repression and facilitate the continuation of the movement. Even so, focusing on these details shouldn't stop us from having a certain strategy and seeing the bigger picture.

The question constantly being asked these days is, “what now?” What will the resolution be if the same level of protest and suppression continues in these disorganized conditions? In other words, if this movement continues like this for a year instead of fifty days, can we expect that the regime will end eventually? If not, what can be done to elevate the movement one step ahead of the current point?

Assessing this next step is only possible if we understand where we are now.

Where do we stand?

Revolution is a process. It is a train that passes through different stops. Popular revolt is always the first stop but reaching the terminus of a social and political “revolution” is impossible without passing through a “revolutionary situation.” What do we mean by the revolutionary situation? It is a situation in which “the ruled no longer accept the existing order, and the ruling class is no longer able to maintain the status quo.” In the current situation of Iran, the first condition is present; that is, the majority of the society no longer tolerates or accepts the current political system. As for the second condition, the Iranian regime has still not completely lost control of the situation despite all the protests. Although the Iranian regime has received major blows to its economic and political integrity at home and abroad, heavy repression has so far maintained the apparatus and financial resources needed for its survival (that is, the two main pillars of material power). As long as the Iranian regime holds this “material power,” arriving at the “revolutionary situation” is impossible.

If we look at 1979, we see this revolutionary situation form during the Pahlavi regime's retreat and attempted reforms: the release of political prisoners, the dissolution of the ruling party, the return of previously banned parties, the ruling class's request for negotiations and discussion with the revolutionary forces, the relative tolerance of street protests, and the collapse of the repressive forces after the mutiny of soldiers.

Despite sensationalized stories perpetrated by today's right-wing media that high-ranking officials are fleeing Iran with suitcases of gold, it is clear that we are far from the revolutionary situation described above.

But what is the reason for the absence of the revolutionary situation in Iran today? The answer is that the current uprising is geographically divided. For example, while some major universities are building “dual power,” many others are not. The state is incapable of fully suppressing students, maintaining regular classrooms, and unifying campus conditions. Despite the strong

presence of security and plain clothes officers on campuses, students continue to impose their power: boycotting classes, desegregating previously gendered spaces (dining halls and cafeterias), and refusing compulsory Hijab rules in the classroom. For example, in one viral video from Sanandaj University, we see male and female students come together in a gender-segregated cafeteria, holding hands and dancing on tables. On a smaller scale, there are examples of this dual power in high schools. Principals, vice-principals, and pro-state teachers cannot control the students: girl students block the mandatory veiling rules by boycotting classes and school trips when the administration attempts to reimpose them. The principals of the schools often resort to using security forces to regain control. Therefore, maintaining dual power in high schools is more difficult, temporary, and unstable compared to universities due to students' lack of experience and greater vulnerability to repression.

Contrary to schools and universities, there is a meaningful silence in workplaces and government offices. Despite the increasing difficulty for most of society to make a living and an active and politicized labor movement prior to this uprising, all workers' actions have been made impossible. The state and the employers have utilized two approaches: first, by paying overdue wages and meeting basic demands, and second by militarizing the workplace.

The same heterogeneity exists with street protests. For example, in some districts of Kurdistan, grassroots forces have advanced to coordinate the seizure of government buildings and recapturing them after losing their temporary control. In other districts, the control of the streets is practically in the hands of the people from dusk onwards; they set up street checkpoints and identify and punish mercenaries. In short, they control the city after dark and impose their authority. Street protests elsewhere differ greatly from Kurdistan: recently, street protests happen suddenly. These 'sudden gatherings' have resulted from an asymmetrical balance of power. Neither protesters nor repressive forces are able to exert control.

In a revolutionary situation, dual power emerges simultaneously in the streets, on campuses, in factories, and in government offices and is relatively stable. Now the question is, if we are not yet in a "revolutionary situation," then what stage are we at? And how can this stand-off be overcome?

Although we are not in a revolutionary situation at the moment, we have definitely passed the stages of 'protest' and 'insurrection' and are on the way to one. Unlike the popular uprisings in 2017 and 2019 (clear examples of popular riots, without which we would never reach this point today), we can now talk about a 'movement' that is developing a vision of the future and exerting consistent opposition. New factors are involved in these developments: university strikes, the radicalization of high schools; the full-blown revolt of women through disobedience and disregard for compulsory veiling in public spaces; the participation of lawyers and doctors; the expansion of political strikes involving IT specialists, teachers, contract workers, and medical professions (even if some groups join temporarily and limited in size); and the participation of middle-class such as tradesmen; the spread of progressive symbols and slogans (especially on Women's rights issues); remarkable solidarity among national minorities (such as Kurdish, Azeri, and Baluch). Such widespread upheavals have transformed these protests into a political

movement, strengthening the movement to overthrow the status quo.

Facilitating the revolutionary situation: how will workers' strikes change the equation?

The current movement is like a big machine with different moving parts. However, the flame of a revolution, AKA the workers' strike, has yet to be lit. Most discussions on the topic of general strikes have hyper-focused on economic aspects, risking the disregard of its social and political functions. Because of such misconceptions, the right wing assumes that the imposition of international sanctions can economically replace the general strike. However, the experience of the economic embargo has shown, time and again, that governments will spend their last dollar on maintaining their survival, even if they must resort to reducing public services and increasing exploitation and repression. However, in a general strike, the issue is not simply economically damaging the government through the refusal of workers, civil servants, and soldiers to work. On the contrary, the general strike is the taking control of factories, government offices, and government arsenals to strengthen the movement.

In addition, it is through the general strike that strike committees emerge, historically the backbone of the revolutionary workers' councils (Showras). In this situation, as state power has lost its legitimacy and authority, dual power is solidified. A society-based government has gained power but has yet to gain control. This condition can only be realized through the general strike. It is precisely at this point that the right-wing opposition's classless analysis of the general strike differs sharply from that of the socialists.

From this point of view, the general strike is a revolutionary strategy. Whether 50 days have passed since the beginning of the movement or 150 days, our main task in guiding the movement into a revolutionary situation remains the same: to create the conditions for a workers' strike. Some factions of the right opposition have issued empty statements and strike calls as a shortcut to end the regime. If one-tenth of this energy had been spent on expanding solidarity networks in the workplace (even if symbolic and anonymous), we would be closer to the revolutionary situation than ever before. The gains of the struggle in the streets and the universities in recent weeks have been so spectacular that we must develop a strategy to sustain these achievements.

The Question of Leadership

In common sense (and sometimes deliberately), 'political leadership' manifests itself as a single individual or figure. However, revolutionary leadership is nothing but putting forward a political program above all else. This political program is nothing but an action plan to direct and achieve class-based solutions to the needs and demands of the people. After its inception, what remains is the promotion and organization of the struggle around the program. Hollow calls for 'council governments' and 'council administration' cannot replace a political program. This is for the simple reason that a group meant to embody the people's demands has not yet been actualized. Therefore, if the idea of a council cannot be concretized, it will go in one ear and out the other for the masses.

The political program must target two areas:

1. Ownership: This is perhaps the heart of the revolutionary program and issue necessary to the word revolution becoming supported by the people. Issues such as: what will happen to the ownership of large industries (such as petrochemicals, power plants, communications, mining, etc.) after the fall of the Islamic Republic? Logically, the issue of ownership cannot be addressed immediately. Whoever seizes the ownership of national resources will become the ruling power. The phrase “all power to the people” without adding “public ownership of the means of production” is a joke. It is, therefore, our duty to relate class issues and the necessity of public ownership for the movement’s future.

2. The struggle for democratic rights: the liberation of women, children, LGBT people, oppressed nations, and religious minorities; freedom of expression; the abolition of the death penalty; and all other actions to guarantee a life of dignity.

It is certain that the only way to realize the most basic democratic demands in countries like Iran is through a socialist revolution. All factions of the capitalist opposition lack any democratic capacity. For most of the public, however, this fact is not self-evident. Now, for the first time, a progressive movement has emerged in which the defense of democratic rights is the main demand. This, more than ever, differentiates the progressive forces from the anti-democratic reactionaries. The same oppositional forces which, until yesterday, said: “Oppression does not have a gender.” They changed their colors in the blink of an eye under the pressure of the people’s demand for women’s rights. Despite this, they still failed to hide their extremely anti-democratic nature (especially on the national question and the right to self-determination). In such conditions, defending the democratic rights of all oppressed groups is central to a socialist program’s goal of gaining their confidence and support.

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